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February 2019

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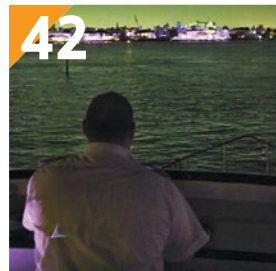
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Tahoe

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The basic subscription price is \$19.97 for 11 issues. Cover price is \$3.95. Canadian and Foreign subscriptions add \$20.00 per 11 issues. U.S. funds only. Limited back issues are available for \$5.00 each.

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CORPORATE OFFICE
 Harris Publishing, Inc.
 360 B Street, Idaho Falls, ID 83402
 (208) 542-2293 • Fax (208) 522-5241
www.pdbmagazine.com

Also publishers of Houseboat and Great Lakes Boating magazines.



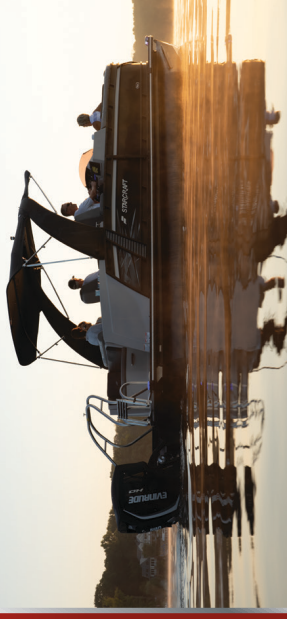
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CAPTAIN'S CHAIR

By Brady L. Kay

“

What if the incentive to donate to an extremely worthwhile cause also provided you with something you could really use?

”

Tailgate For Cancer Is Raffling What?



Those with children or grandchildren are probably already familiar with the term “fundraising.” It is what schools, clubs, athletic teams and others do to raise money for youth activities. From tubs of cookie dough and scented candles to wrapping paper and discount punch cards you'll never use, the reason we donate usually isn't for the incentive, but rather for the cause. It is how these young kids get better sports equipment or opportunities to perform in various competitions.

But what if the incentive to donate to an extremely worthwhile cause also provided you with something you could really use in return? I'd call that a win/win for everybody, but in this case, it's a huge win for those who benefit from the efforts provided by St. Marys Tailgate For Cancer.

This registered 501(c)(3) organization has been getting more and more creative each year with its fundraising campaigns and is dedicated to raising funds for cancer research, cancer patient assistance organizations and other related charities. Its annual event is organized entirely by volunteers with support from generous sponsors and donors. To this point, raffled items have included Ohio State vs. Michigan football tickets, golf carts, a diamond necklace, rental vacations and other top prizes. Plus Lisa Cisco, founder of the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer (www.buckeyecruise.com) and the main drive behind this organization, recently provided another 10 cabins to be raffled off.

To celebrate St. Marys Tailgate for Cancer's 10th year anniversary, a goal was set to raise \$1 million in total donations this year so Traci Lauth, president of St. Marys Tailgate for Cancer, teamed up with The Boathouse at Grand Lake in Celina, Ohio, to offer something every family could appreciate: a brand-new pontoon.

On March 29, one lucky winner will receive the keys to a 2018 Avalon GS 2385 triple pontoon boat with a trailer and powered by a Mercury 150hp four-stroke outboard. That's right: while supporting this great cause you'll be giving yourself a chance to win an Avalon pontoon boat. Raffle tickets are \$100 each with a maximum of 1,000 tickets sold and the winner does not need to be present to win.

To give you a little more background, St. Marys Tailgate for Cancer got started in 2009. In 2008, Cisco, the owner of Travel Partners in Dublin, Ohio, was inspired to raise money for cancer. She decided to buy out a cruise ship and have a floating tailgate. She mortgaged her home to buy out the whole ship for this cause. Lauth and a few people from St. Marys, Ohio, went on the cruise to support Cisco. After the cruise, they were so moved by what she was doing that they wanted to support her cause. So a few friends got together and formed St. Marys Tailgate for Cancer to help Cisco in her endeavor. They hoped to raise \$1,000 their first year but well exceeded expectations by raising \$25,000. Since then, it has continued to grow and the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer remains a huge event for this organization. In fact, last year alone the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer raised \$3 million dollars on their cruise.

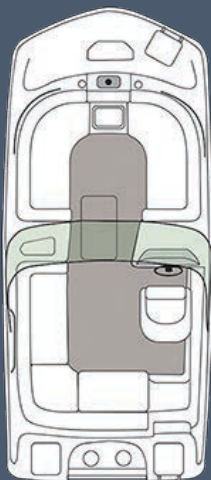
“It is a first-class cruise like you have never seen before,” says committee member Lisa Ruppert. “Lisa and her crew pay attention to every detail. It is a great experience for everyone who goes.

Again, all proceeds benefit St. Marys Tailgate for Cancer. To purchase a raffle ticket for a chance to win the Avalon pontoon, go to www.tailgateforcancer.com or call 419-953-4559 and maybe it could be you holding those keys next month. ●

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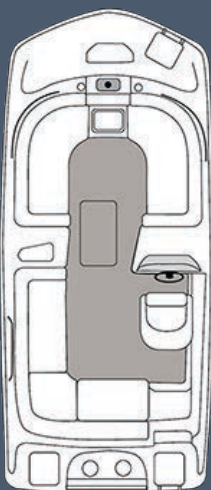
SunDeck 187 OB



\$26,795

BASE BOAT & MOTOR ONLY

Does not include trailer, options, rigging or freight.



SunDeck Sport 188 OB



\$25,595

BASE BOAT & MOTOR ONLY

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7 Life Hacks

From oil changes and propeller checkups, to protecting your gel coat and washing away mold, maintaining a boat can be a lot of work. Even with all that work, boaters know it's well worth the effort when they're cruising with a tube in tow, catching a giant bass or just spending time on the water.

The stress of the week seems to melt away out on the water, but when your boat is a mess and you can't find what you need, the day can become a little hectic. Here are a few life hacks that anyone can use for a relaxing day on the lake.

1. Flip-flop Organizer

Trying to walk anywhere on your boat is impossible with flip-flops flung all over the floor. But tucking them away in storage means they aren't easily accessible when you need them. To keep shoes out of the way but easy to reach, all you need is a bungee cord.

Wrap a bungee cord around your boat cooler; make sure the cord is tight but not about to snap off. Then, simply slide the shoes in between your cooler and the bungee cord for quick, easy storage.

If you don't have a bungee cord on board, maybe you have an extra over-the-door shoe organizer sitting at home. This will also work to keep shoes off the deck and in a safe place.



2. Caddy Storage

Dump the shampoo and conditioner out of your shower caddy and bring it on board for another great storage hack. Bathroom caddies fit all your sunglasses, beverages, sunblock and other personal items you need on hand while out on your boat.

Mount the caddy an arm's length away — either vertically or on a flat surface — to keep the items you need close and all in the same place.



3. Cooler Pad

At fast speeds and bumpy turns, coolers tend to go flying across the floor, sometimes spilling their contents onto your deck. With a damp towel, which you probably already

have on board, you can solve this problem.

Dip your towel overboard and ring it out, then fold it into roughly the size of your cooler. Place the towel underneath and it will stay put.

Although boating can be a lot of work, the reward is well worth it. Make your days on the lake more enjoyable with these boater-approved life hacks.

4. White Vinegar Kills Mold

Killing musty, moldy spots on fabric requires a heavy-duty cleaner, but these cleaners can be expensive. Before you buy the pricey solution, try white vinegar instead. White vinegar costs less than bleach and doesn't emit the toxic fumes.

For clean carpets, vacuum them beforehand to remove any loose dirt. Soak the carpet



Using products beyond intended use

with clean water first, scrub it lightly then let it sit while you mix the vinegar solution. Combine a half cup of white vinegar with a half-gallon of warm water and pour the mixture into small areas of the floor at a time. Let the vinegar sit in that area for several minutes before scrubbing it with a soft brush. Once you've cleaned all the small sections, rinse the fabric with clean water again. Let the fabric dry completely before jetting off on your next boating adventure.



5. Wine Corks Key Chain

Your car keys don't get the same safety precautions as the keys to your boat. Without a key float, your car keys are dying to slip out of your hands and into the depths of the lake. You could buy a key float, but you probably already have a free version sitting at home: wine corks. A wine cork key chain is simple to assemble and the buoyancy of the cork will keep your keys afloat.

To make a wine cork key chain all you need is small screw eyes and a few paper key labels. For the first step, just twist the screw eye directly into one end of the cork, preferably the end not already punctured by the corkscrew. Once you've secured the hook, add a metal ring onto it. Then the last step is to attach your car keys.

Doing a float test before taking it out on the lake is a good idea. But once you're done, you'll have a simple key float made from items sitting around your house.

6. Gear Hammocks

This cheap storage trick is perfect for smooth water cruising. You can find gear hammocks online — if you don't already own one — for an affordable price. A gear hammock packs fragile items like produce and snacks perfectly, and utilizes space that would otherwise not serve as storage.

Make sure not to store heavy items, or the gear hammock may give out. To keep the items extra safe, don't hang the hammock directly next to a sidewall, or the waves may leave your produce with some bruises.

7. Fishy Hands

As fishermen know, smelly bait and fish odor linger on your fingers. No matter how often you wash your hands the stench clings to your skin and under your fingernails.

Keeping some toothpaste on board may fix this problem. Mix any mint toothpaste — the kind that includes baking soda is best — with your liquid hand soap. Lather, rinse, repeat, and your hands will smell good as new. •



NWZ

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As soon as you find the paddle, email your name, hometown, and its location to paddle@pdbmagazine.com. Paddle on!



Where's The Paddle?

A paddle is hiding inside each issue of *PDB* and the names of the first ten readers to find it are printed in an upcoming magazine! In our January Buyer's Guide it was a little more challenging than normal. The paddle is on page 28 in the right hand corner on the floor of the boat. Here are the only readers who spotted it:

Dan Criner, Richmond, Va.

Ken Braun, Hartford, Wis.

Gary Rengers, Chaska, Minn.

Vince Gruner, Mesa, Ariz.

Brandi Latham, Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Jon Poulson, Atwood Lake, Ohio



Sea Ray Celebrates 60

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Sea Ray at the helm of defining the boating lifestyle. Sea Ray attributes its lasting popularity and evolution of industry-leading product to the achievements of its dedicated team.

"We have a bold vision for the future, which touches all facets of our operations, and a relentless dedication to be the best — all supported by investment in technology, capacity and people," says Brad Anderson, Sea Ray president and general manager. "As a leader in this organization, I can't tell you how excited I am heading into our 60th year knowing the bright future ahead of us, and that is grounded by our strong heritage and the confidence I have in our organization." **865-637-3960 | www.searay.com**

Who Said It? Quotes from this issue

"There is no better way to end the boating season than to take a 650-mile, three-day ride with three of your closest friends on a pontoon boat." —**Page 18**

"Some labels are worth holding onto as tightly as you can, like the word 'comfort,' which has become a staple when describing Bennington pontoons." —**Page 36**

"Just a short decade ago, stern drives were the market leaders. Not anymore. The market has seemingly overcome the old, 'tall and handsome but ugly on the transom' stigma of outboards." —**Page 48**



Leave Sand On The Beach

Nauti Steps are a new pontoon accessory that first debuted at the Minneapolis Boat Show last month. The portable step includes a built-in water basin to help keep your feet clean, while preventing unwanted debris such as sand, dirt and grass from getting on your boat.

Ideal for boaters who want to keep their boat clean, Nauti Steps provides easier accessibility to getting on and off. As an alternative to ladders, the steps include a haircell texture with grooves to help prevent slipping and promote safety. www.nautisteps.com



Correction

In our January Buyer's Guide we misidentified Barletta's top-selling model, which is the L25UC. The L25UC features premium amenities throughout (furniture, helm station, sound system, ultra-lounge) as well as a patent-pending underdeck structure that provides a smooth, quiet ride on the water while performing like a traditional V-hull boat. You'll also find USB charging ports in every lounge,

pet food/water dishes built-in, fender holders, tube/tow bar, and "Yeti-Ready" cupholders throughout. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused our readers.

LOA: 27' 6"

Beam: 8' 6"

Max People: 14

Max HP: 400hp

Fuel Capacity: 48 gal.

Price Range: \$80K to \$89K

574-825-8900

www.barlettapontoonboats.com



New Pontoon For Anglers!

Lowe is kicking off the year with the new SF 232 WT and just like the SF 212 WT, the new SF 232 WT combines all the amenities for a fun-filled day on the water.

It has a spacious and convenient walk-thru layout and counting the fishing seats in the bow, there's plenty of comfortable seating throughout, including dual rear-facing loungers in the stern. Consumers are able to choose from several factory-installed MotorGuide trolling motor and Lowrance fishfinder options, while a heavy-duty Bimini top will provide welcome shade.

Lowe developed an innovative fishing layout using a walk-thru aft-to-bow design with a mirrored furniture concept for a true symmetrical look. The new model uses existing fence concepts and SF features, plus a bow fishing layout (rod box, livewell, and battery box) was developed that anglers are going to love!

Other noteworthy features include standard vertical rod holder storage with tackle box on port fence and an option to upgrade the bow fishing seats to a 23-inch helm seat or 29-inch recliners. Offered in two log or TL packages and available with tan or gray interiors with all the fence color options that are available in the SF lineup, the new SF 232 WT allows you to customize your pontoon to fit your specific needs. **417-532-9101** | www.loweboats.com



ELUX Marine charges into Minneapolis

Temperatures outside may have been cool at the Minneapolis Boat Show in January, but inside ELUX Marine delivered a welcomed boost to the boating industry with its introduction of the 100 percent electric luxury fiberglass pontoon. Chief Design Officer Bart Jones — along with Howard Root who serves as the chief executive officer — is bringing a new concept to pontooning.

“Trouble-free means no gas to fill, no oil to change, no ignition to fail, no engine to winterize and best of all, no emissions to pollute,” says Jones.

Based in Minnesota, ELUX electric luxury pontoon is powered by a 72-volt, 420-amp lithium battery pack, secured in an aluminum battery case, for over 10 hours of pontoon cruising on a single charge. Look for a full review in *PDB* once the waters thaw. **952-657-2586 | www.eluxmarine.com**



Surf Boss Is Here

Montara Boats has cracked the code on how to blend the plushness of a pontoon with the performance of a surf boat and has officially released the industry's first and only pontoon you can surf behind.

Since announcing its Surf Boss surfing pontoon in mid-October, Montara has welcomed 27 dealers to its retail network and has more than 23 additional dealerships pending. Montara's patent-pending Surf Boss has struck a positive cord with boaters and retailers.

“We've already sold four Surf Bosses,” said Aaron Fell, CEO of Breakwater Marine in Surrey, BC. “This may be the most amazing product I've seen in the past decade. People love being able to make everyone in the family happy. The comfort of a pontoon combined with surfing and wake sports fun makes total sense.”

Offering three sizes, Montara's production is focused on bringing the 25-foot version to market first, followed by 23- and 21-foot versions. Standard equipment for the collection includes a 409hp PCMinboard engine, Zero Off GPS speed control, a surf tab system and a 5,000-pound ballast system. Plush amenities include jumbo transom loungers with fore/aft viewing, a full-size head, dual swiveling captain's chairs, Rockford Fosgate premium audio system, dual Bimini tops, LED lighting, USB chargers and full digital controls.

952-445-5700 | www.montaraboats.com



Mercury Campus Expands

Only eight months after breaking ground, Mercury Marine officially opened a new state-of-the-art expansion last fall at its global headquarters in Fond du Lac, Wis. The two-story NVH (Noise, Vibration, Harshness) Technical Center adds close to 20,000 additional square feet to the more than 2.5 million square-foot campus. This \$10M investment to Mercury's global headquarters gives the company the largest and most expansive testing facility in the marine industry. In total, Mercury has invested more than \$1B globally in expansion and R&D since 2008.

NVH is the engineering practice of studying noise, vibration and harshness characteristics; these are integral to the boating experience, ensuring the quietest and most peaceful engine for the consumer. The new technical center houses two marine-specific hemi-anechoic chambers, structural dynamic testing bays, listening rooms, offices and workspaces.

www.mercurymarine.com



Check Out This Nauti Table

The pontoon accessories business has exploded in recent years as the popularity of these crafts continues to grow. Approximately two years ago, Mike Bires patented an idea that makes a lot of sense for pontoon owners who are always seeking more table space onboard.

The Nauti Bar Table is a standup bar table that mounts to an existing ski/tow bar and is currently available online and it will also be on display at select boat shows this spring. According to Bires, who is the CEO of Longpointe Nautical, the patent covers the standard ski/tow table as well as the single-post pylon version.

www.nautibartable.com

A Ski/Tow Made For Any Transom

Many boaters would like to add a ski/tow to the stern of their boat, but don't want to further clutter what is often an already busy space. The Flush-Mounted Ski Tow from Accon Marine keeps the transom free of protruding hardware while providing a discreet and secure point for attaching such a line.



Made from durable 316 stainless steel for optimal strength and corrosion resistance, the patented, four-piece assembly consists of the main body, a sealing cup, backing plate and gasket and retails for \$48. Installation is simple and the curved hook faces back into itself for a safe design.

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CORINTHIAN MARINE
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Tracing The Path Of The Edmund Fitzgerald

Avalon pontoon conquers Lake Superior



By Jim Wolf
Avalon/Tahoe Pontoons CEO

After each trip, the question is always the same: “Where are you going next?” My standard answer is, “Not sure, but we will know when the time comes.” August 17 was a picture-perfect boating day in northern Michigan. At the Pink Pony on Mackinaw Island Karen and I were sitting at an outdoor table listening to Patrick Springsteen, a local solo artist. Nearby, boats and kayakers drifted as the ferries were busy bringing tourists to and from the Island. As our waiter dropped off a few tropical drinks, I proudly looked at the sun reflecting off the Cuba pontoon — a 27-foot Avalon Ambassador with twin Mercury 400’s — floating mightily behind Patrick who was clicking through the songs. I was immediately in decompression mode. After 30 minutes or so Patrick started to play Gordon

Lightfoot’s *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald* and that’s when it hit me. I turned to Karen and said, “I know where the next trip is going to be and it’s going to happen soon.”

I wanted to follow the last path of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, go to the wreck site and end up right back on our hoist in Burt Lake. It would be perfect. We could wait for the right weather and then conquer Lake Superior.

The Edmund Fitzgerald

Anyone growing up in Michigan has heard the song a thousand times. Lightfoot wrote the song as a tribute to the ship’s crew, as all 29 men died aboard the ship without so much as a distress call. From the song I knew it was one of the biggest freighters on the Great Lakes; I knew that it battled

an early November gale with freezing rain in the face of a hurricane west wind; I knew that the searchers all say they’d have made Whitefish Bay if they’d put 15 more miles behind her and I knew from the last line of the song, “Superior, they said, never gives up her dead when the gales of November come early.” After returning from Mackinaw I jumped on the Internet to learn more. After a bit of digging, I learned that the large cargo vessels that roamed the five Great Lakes were known as “Lakers,” and the SS *Edmund Fitzgerald* was, at the time, the biggest ever built. The *Fitz* was christened on June 8, 1958 and made its first voyage in September of that same year. It was commissioned and owned by Northwestern Mutual Insurance Company at a cost of \$8.4



million and was named after the chairman of the board — Mr. Edmund Fitzgerald. On November 9, 1975 the Fitz was loaded with 26,116 tons of iron ore pellets at the Burlington Northern Railroad Dock in Superior, Wis., and it left the dock at 2:30 p.m. A second ship, the Arthur M. Anderson sailed 10 to 15 miles behind the Fitzgerald as a precaution, and the two ships remained in radio contact until just after 7 p.m. on November 10th. The swells reached 35 feet and winds raged at nearly 100 mph. The ship contacted Coast Guard officials in Sault Ste. Marie and said they were taking on water. Captain Ernest McSorley was on his final voyage before retirement. He assured a crew member on the Anderson at 7:10 that evening, “We are holding our own” and that was the last anyone heard from McSorley or the Fitzgerald. The exact cause of the sinking remains unknown. The freighter now lies on the bottom of Lake Superior in two sections, at a depth of 535 feet approximately 17 miles northwest of Whitefish Point.

The Plan

I reached out to my neighbor, who is very well connected with the Coast Guard. He put me in contact with the Sector Commander from Sault Saint Marie who in turn put me into contact with CW04 Scott Harroun (senior marine inspector based out of Duluth, Minn.). Scott was helpful in putting Lake Superior in perspective and blunt when talking about the safety considerations. Should anything go wrong, hypothermia would be our biggest risk factor. Scott stated we would be on our own and needed to

plan to survive for up to two and a half hours between the distress call and any type of meaningful response. In addition to the standard items in our ditch bag (EPIRB, spot satellite messenger, personal locator beacons, strobes, handheld marine radios, flashlights, etc.), it was apparent that a life raft and dry suits were a must for this journey. We also discussed the lack of cell service and the benefits of having a satellite phone, or other forms of communication, in addition to the standard marine radio.

The boat would be the 27-foot Avalon Ambassador with twin Mercury racing engines that we had taken from Clearwater, Fla., to Cuba in June of 2017. The boat was a stock boat other than the addition of a second 100-gallon fuel tank, giving the boat a range of 200 plus miles.

The plan was to depart from Superior, on Monday, September 17 and be back to Burt Lake by Wednesday the 19th. Next on the agenda was to find a crew. Duane Dinninger

MORE INFO

Avalon Pontoons | 800-334-2913

www.avalonpontoons.com

Mercury Marine | 920-929-5040

www.mercurymarine.com

To read the full version of this journey [click here](#)

is my right-hand man, long-time high school buddy and lifelong boater. Also, boat smart, mechanically inclined and was one of the crew on our Pacific excursion in 2015 so he was in, but after a change in the forecast, on a moment's notice the date had to be moved up so the other two members I was planning on were now out. I called John Linn who lives in Brainerd, Minn., and shoots all of our still photography. I first met John when he was “on assignment” to document our second excursion trip from Chicago to Mackinaw in June of 2006. John, who has been our photographer ever since, is a dear friend and would be a good addition.

I kept thinking it sure would be nice to find a fourth crew member. Three is okay, but four is always better. The six or seven calls to friends and potential crew members proved fruitless due to the short notice. “Yes, tomorrow morning,” I kept saying to each one of them.

Travel Day

Indian River, Mich., To Superior, Wis.: 9h:34m, 441.4 miles

We would drive the 3 miles to Indian River Sports Center where the truck and trailer would be waiting. Scott Foresmark, who lives year-around on Burt Lake, was on my short list of calls the prior night. He called back that morning and said he had been up all night thinking about the trip and decided he's in. I must have been grinning from ear to ear and thinking this was meant to be. We have our fourth and he will be a “value added” crew member, especially if we have any medical or dental issues along the way.

It's always busy at Indian River Sports Center and as we pulled in, there was a flurry of activity. I saw the Cuba boat loaded on the trailer and ready to go. A few last-minute items including spare props, oil filters, etc. were still being loaded. The inflatable paddle board, extra fuel cans, anchor and lines, bumpers and Mustang Survival life vests were already on board and secured.

After 20 minutes up I-75 we crossed over the Mackinaw Bridge with Mackinaw Island in the distance. The Straights of Mackinaw were calm, the



sun was bright and the air warm. "Wow," I said. "This is a picture-perfect day to be on the water, boys." The 440-mile ride across the Upper Peninsula was long. At one point, I was thinking it had been less than 24 hours since we decided to fast-track the trip and here we were three hours down the road. I was reading more about the Edmund, Lake Superior, etc., when a thought crossed my mind. I called Dalton Sheldon back at the plant and asked him to find a flower shop in Superior that would deliver 29 roses with the names of each crew member stapled to each stem to Barkers Island Resort. A few fuel stops and nine hours later we rolled into Superior with a windshield full of bugs and a 27-foot Ambassador in tow.

Day One

Superior To Copper Harbor: 10h:17m, 220.15 miles

Up early, I grabbed the life raft, survival suits and flowers from the front desk and took them to the boat before hooking up with Maria Lockwood from the Superior Telegram. Oh yeah, our Coast Guard contact, Scott, is en route too. Getting the boat situated with the sun rising, John appeared out of nowhere with his wife Carna in tow.

Coast Guard Scott came aboard to check out the rig while John immediately went to work with his camera. After 20 minutes or so Scott and Carna were on their way and we were sitting down for breakfast with Maria from the [Superior Telegram]. After some breakfast and questions about why we do these trips, pontoon boats, the Fitzgerald, etc., we were off. There were hugs and goodbyes to our driver Harold Reckinger as I thought to myself, "I'm sure glad to be going back by boat instead of by car!"

It's 9:30 a.m. and we are finally on our way! Exhilaration and excitement set in as we passed Maria and Harold on the way out. It was a balmy 80-plus-degree day, the seas were calm, we have our four-man crew, 220 gallons of fuel and two 400hp Mercury's pushing us out to sea. As we passed the lighthouse at the end of the inlet, I thought to myself, "Wow this is really happening."

Our first destination was 50 miles up the shoreline to the Bayfield Peninsula sea caves located a few miles past Bark Point. John had done some previous photo shoots in the area and knew exactly where to go. We played around for 45 minutes or so as we took photos, flew the drone and soaked up the natural beauty of the cliffs, rock formations and caves. Next, we navigated through the Apostle Islands. The Apostle Islands is an archipelago of 22 islands located in Lake Superior off the Bayfield Peninsula. Twenty-one of these islands, and a 12-mile segment along the shore of Wisconsin's north coast, is known as the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Paying close attention to the weather, we knew the winds were picking up to 10 to 15 mph south/southwest and that waves could be a challenge as we crossed the open water towards Ontonagon which was our first scheduled fuel stop. We pondered sticking close to the southern shore, but after going offshore five or ten miles with manageable seas, we decided to go straight across towards the Porcupine Mountains on the eastern shore, which was a 40-plus-mile open water run. We hit a few sections of 3- to 5-foot waves during the crossing, but all in

all it was a fun ride to the other shore. The water color changed from blue to brown as we entered the Ontonagon inlet. A few miles upstream we located the fuel dock and after filling up we were back in the blue water with another 100 miles of coastline to get to Copper Harbor. As Duane was at the wheel, I called Dalton back at the office to help us find a few rooms for the night. He called back with a few suggestions, one of which was the Mariner North Resort. Copper Harbor has no cellular service in the entire town so I worked it out with the owner Peggy to pick us up. After a few calculations, I told her to expect us at around 8 p.m. About halfway from Ontonagon to Copper Harbor we passed the Houghton Inlet. There were several boats anchored along the shore as fellow-boaters were soaking up the last of the warm rays on what felt like a mid-July summer day. With John working the videos and stills, we took a few passes by the lighthouse markers that flanked the mouth of the inlet. The final push to Copper Harbor was smooth and fast with plenty of impressive rock formations coupled with natural beaches to gaze at along the way. As we turned into Copper Harbor it was apparent we were heading west due to a blinding ball of fire low in the sky. The marina is at the very end of the harbor where Peggy was waiting for us at the boat ramp. We dropped bags off at our rooms and quickly made our way to the restaurant as they stopped serving at 9 p.m. A few steaks and drinks later we were ready to call it a night. We talked to Peggy about giving us a ride back in the morning around 7 a.m., which she was not really keen to do. Instead, she said, "Why don't you take my car and leave it at the marina? I always leave it unlocked with the keys in it. This is, after all, Copper Harbor."

Day Two

Copper Harbor To Grand Marais: 11h:41m, 146.96 miles

Call time was 6:30 a.m. Lying in bed at 6:10 a.m., I immediately noticed the curtains that covered the screened window were blowing and weaving, first slowly and then more violently. "Not good," I thought. Outside was more of the same with the treetops blowing from side to side and the flags standing straight out. The wind was blowing 16 knots, building to 20 knots and supposed to taper off around 1 p.m. The winds were south/southwest, which meant we would be taking them



head

on once

we rounded the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula, which was approximately 15 miles to our east. Locating Peggy's car parked around the corner, I slowly opened the door and looked around to make sure I found the right one. I recognized a pair of shoes sitting between the rear bucket seats which provided some relief that I wouldn't be doing time for grand theft.

We made a quick stop at the Copper Harbor sign to get a group picture on the way into the marina. With the boat loaded and Peggy's car sitting solo in the parking lot, we pushed off with the sun rising below a bank of dark billowing clouds. We passed and waved to the patrons on a ferry boat as we made our way towards the jetty. Back in the open water with the shore off the starboard side, we cruised along at 15 to 18 mph for four or five miles as we sipped our pressed coffee and checked the weather reports. During dinner the night before, John pulled up the Wikipedia page for the Stannard Rock Lighthouse. I was intrigued when I read it was completed in 1883 and is located on a reef that was the most serious hazard to navigation on Lake Superior. The exposed crib of the Stannard Rock Light is rated as one of the top ten engineering feats in the United States. It is 24 miles from the nearest land, making it the most distant lighthouse in the United States. It was one of the "stag stations," manned only by men, and had the nickname, "The loneliest place in the world." Our plan was to go there, but not now, not with this wind. As things stood it was going to be a really long day!

We debated if we should hug the shore down towards Marquette or if we should make a straight line to Munising. We decided to wait and see what the conditions would bring once we got around the peninsula. I pondered the fact that we were unable to refuel in Copper Harbor as the fuel dock did not open until 9 a.m. this late in the season. The one-third rule (one-third out, one-third back, one-third in reserve) would not apply today and according to our estimates, we would be cutting it close.

"Ready boys?" I asked. Bringing the boat up to speed, it suddenly stuttered and slowed a bit. For a second it felt like we may have hit something, but then we quickly realized that we had spun a hub. When you spin a hub, as we did on our Bimini excursion to the Bahamas, you must replace the hub kit by removing or replacing the prop. We learned a valuable lesson in the Gulf Stream and have brought a spare along ever since. Turning the boat around I was thinking we would have to idle the five miles or so back to Copper Harbor to find a convenient location to swap out the props. Scanning the shoreline there were a lot of rock outcrops 75 to 100 yards off shore. Noticing a few areas where no rocks were visible, we headed in and made our way to the rocky shore. Using the anchor lines, we were able to spin the boat around to get the back of the boat close enough to shore to make the change. Twenty minutes later we were navigating our way back to open water.

As we rounded the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula, the wind and waves hit us straight in the face. Three- to 5-foot waves in the typical tight Great Lakes wave pattern proved to be a challenge. Winds were gusting at 20 knots and were not

scheduled to subside for several hours. We kept moving and continued debating our best path given the conditions. After 45 minutes we were 15 miles off shore on a heading direct to Munising. After another hour, land started to slowly disappear on the horizon as we battled the waves. With one hand on the throttles and the other on the wheel, I worked to avoid taking waves over the bow while minimizing the banging on the way down. We were averaging 15 to 18 mph and had 90 plus miles to go.

At some point 30 or so miles from shore the waves started lying down a bit and we were able to ramp our speed up to 30 mph plus. We were wet, cold and tired as Grand Island came into view. I was keeping an eye on the fuel and we were now down to our last two bars on the digital gauge. After the slow four-hour ride, we wanted to go faster, but kept it at a modest speed to conserve fuel. We could see the larger rock formations on the northwest side of the island when we were four to five miles out. Once there we stayed close to shore checking out the towering walls of rock as we made our way around the east side of the island. A few years back we took a few summer vacations to the Munising area and I knew the area well. I made a point to stop at "my happy place," which is a secluded beach on the north side of the island. Pulling into the beach you feel as though you are on a deserted Caribbean island with crystal clear blue water and pure nature as far as the eye can see. We enjoyed drying out a bit while munching on some chips and dip, and took some more photos.

After the short 30-minute break, we resumed our tour around the island. We arrived at the Munising fuel dock with just over 15 gallons in reserve. While refueling, a shirtless John was pumping the WOW inflatable paddleboard that he would use to shoot from at our next stop, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

We departed the marina at 4:15 p.m. and spent the next three hours taking photos, enjoying the splendor and awe of the area on a picture-perfect afternoon. A few highlights were backing into a cave, spotting a picture of what looked like David Garcia, and putting the bow of the pontoon into a 200-foot-tall waterfall. After a quick swim, we decided it was time to put some more miles behind us.

Given the slow go in the morning, we had to readjust our plans and decided it would make



sense

to spend the night in Grand Marais. I dialed up Dalton and asked him to call around and find four rooms for the night. The Beach Park Hotel gave us a good deal and the owner offered to come down to the marina to pick us up upon our arrival.

With a nearly full tank of gas, we went wide open and cranked up the music for the hour ride. The sun was going down as we made our way and the high-performance Infinity speakers were blaring. Listening to Seal, I had to smile when I heard the lyrics, "But we're never gonna survive unless we get a little crazy."

We tied up, called John, the hotel owner, for a ride, and started gathering our bags. The hotel was only a few blocks away and as we pulled in a huge fireworks show started going off right in front of the hotel and over the bay. I joked that they were for us but John quickly informed us they just held their annual car show event which always concludes with an awesome fireworks display.

Once again it was getting late. We had to rush into town to grab some food before they stopped serving. After dinner, libations and small talk with the locals, we turned in for the night.

Day Three

Grand Marais To Mackinaw Island:
10h:57m, 202.64 miles

Another epic sunrise greeted us as we loaded up the boat. The revised plan was to go out to the site of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* to pay our respects, then beach the boat at the Shipwreck Museum, go through the Soo Locks and end up in Mackinaw late in the day.

The winds were blowing offshore south to southwest at 10 to 15 knots. As we got out a mile or two the waves started building with following seas, averaging 18 to 22 mph most of the way. There were storms in the area and you could see them off in the distance. As land faded away the sun rays were popping in and out of the scattered, dark clouds.

We were all feeling quiet and somber as we were going to pay tribute to the lost crew members, which was in no way a joyous event. At one mile out, we slowed down to idle speed as we worked our way to the site of the wreck. John was getting out the drone and camera gear while I went for the box of flowers. Not knowing if we were going to name each and every crew member, I asked Duane to help me look through the flowers to find the captain's rose. I knew the captain of the ill-fated Laker was named Ernest Michael McSorley. We went through all the names and neither one of us came across it. I said, "He has got to be in here somewhere, let's go through them again." After a second time through we surmised that the flower shop must have only had the names of the crew members and the captain must not have been on that list.

Once we were certain we were over the wreck, we decided to read off each name as we tossed in one rose for each crew member. When the last name was read, we realized there was another broken rose in the bottom of the box. The top was broken off and the stem was

also

broken in two.

Upon further inspection, we found the little paper with Captain McSorley's name typed on it stuck under one of the bottom flaps of the box. It proved to be a strange and eerie moment. We read his name as we tossed in his broken rose. We watched the roses as they floated and danced around on the water.

John packed up his drone and gear and we set a course for the shipwreck museum 17 miles away. The waves were 2 to 3 feet and we kept a steady pace as we headed back towards land. We navigated our way through some old dock pylons a hundred yards or so down the way from the observation platform at the Shipwreck Museum. Close to shore I revved up the Mercury 400s to push the nose of the Avalon up onto the sandy shore. There were groups of tourists milling about on the beach and they gave us a few looks as we quickly hopped off the front and made our way towards the museum.

During the weekend when I came up with the idea for the trip, I had called the museum to speak with the director. I was given Bruce Lynn's email and reached out to him to see if he could provide some insight regarding our planned trip. We had been staying in touch, but due to our last-minute change in the plan, he was unable to be at the museum when we arrived. We were appreciative when he told us that the gentlemen at the ticket booth would have some free passes for entry. We milled around for a half-hour checking out all of the really cool displays including the bell, the dive suit used to bring it up, videos of the wreck, artifacts found, etc.

We grabbed a quick bite, then pushed off and cruised around Whitefish Point and set a heading towards Sault Ste. Marie. A south to southeast wind was now blowing hard. Once again, we were heading straight into the waves and they were only slightly smaller than the ones we faced the prior day. This time around the waves had only traveled 40 miles over open water versus



the 100-plus miles they had traveled the day before. Today I felt a little more aggressive and found a sweet spot between 25 and 28 mph where we would hit a wave and come down on the one behind it. The boat was banging more than I would have liked, however, and we still had a long way to go. This was an excursion trip and we were pushing it to the limits, so our end customers don't have to. The waves were slowly getting smaller and we were slowly going faster as we crossed. About 15 miles out we were still in 2-foot seas, but I now had the throttle pinned as we flew across the tops of the waves at 59 mph. We were all amazed at how well the boat tore through the chop and we were having fun!

We navigated our way down the St. Mary's River to the Soo Locks, which are a set of parallel locks, operated and maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The locks bypass the rapids of the river, where the water falls 21 feet. The locks pass an average of 10,000 ships per year, despite being closed during the winter from January through March, when ice shuts down shipping on the Great Lakes. The lock attendant was a big guy who looked like a lumberjack. He was quite surprised when we told him we had come from Superior.

Once through the locks, we pulled into the George Kemp Marina for fuel and ice. As we filled up the Ambassador, Scott was talking to the crew of a larger pleasure boat and as it turns out they too were from Burt Lake. Now protected with land on both sides we had calm

waters and put the boat through the paces. It was a quick hour down the river as we flew past St. Joseph Island then Drummond Island and into the North Channel that spit us out onto a glassy Lake Huron. It was 3:45 p.m., 88 degrees and one of the best Northern Michigan afternoons of the entire year.

There is no better way to end the boating season than to take a 650-mile, three-day ride with three of your closest friends on a pontoon boat.

Thirty miles later we were floating off the east side of Mackinaw Island staring up at Arch Rock, which is a natural limestone arch that was formed during the ice ages, and to this day stands on the Lake Huron shoreline 146 feet above the water. As I was transfixed on the Arch, I found it to be ironic that at the tail end of the trip I would be right here at Mackinaw Island where this trip idea came a little less than a month before. I was surely glad to be back and especially on such a hot and calm late summer day! The Mighty Mac is five miles long and the longest suspension bridge between anchorages in the Western Hemisphere.

When we determined earlier in the day that Duane and John would be going their own ways, I called Karen and Scott called Brandy to have them meet us in Mackinaw City. As we made our way into the City Dock, we joked we were about to upgrade to a better-looking crew. Karen and Brandy were waiting for us at the dock with their bags and the custom embroidered "Superior Boat" cooler cushions. We had planned to install the cushions to replace the "Cuba Boat" cushions that were on the boat from the Cuba excursion.

Because we stepped up the departure, Dalton could not get the cushions done by the time we had to leave. Sometime during the trip, however, Dalton got them to the girls, who then brought them to us. I love it when a plan comes together, but more importantly, I love having a great team and crew that makes this all happen.

As we made the crossing back to Mackinaw Island, a huge orange and red sun slowly sank into Lake Michigan behind the Mighty Mac. It was picture perfect. ●



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By Heather Magda Serrano

OUR 10

Pile On The Accessories | It's time to upgrade your boat



TurboSwing Ski Tow Bar

Everybody loves riding behind the boat on a tube, but you can run into some issues if your boat wasn't designed for watersports and you don't have anywhere to install a tow pylon. That's where the TurboSwing Ski Tow Bar has you covered since it works on virtually any outboard motor. It even works on twin engines all the way up to 350hp. The genius behind this ski/tow bar lies in its versatile design. The TurboSwing attaches to the transom which is one of the strongest parts of your boat, and the mounting system piggybacks on motor mount bolts that are already present in the transom. From there, all you need is a pair of stabilizing bolts. You can even pull multiple tubes at the same time as long as you get separate pulleys for each one. Not to mention that the TurboSwing enhances your towing performance since the rope can swing sideways in either direction, improving the rider's angle and reducing jerks on the tow rope. With the pivot-point kept at the aft of the motor, it also makes the boat easier to handle while pulling your riders. **\$529 and up | www.turboswing.com**



Wireless Stereo Remote

Ready for convenience? Then say hello to this compact, easy-to-use wireless stereo remote that FUSION recently released. The ARX70 ANT remote is like none other, giving you the freedom to control your FUSION ANT-enabled entertainment system from anywhere on your boat. It's super easy to use and comfortable to the touch with its rubberized tactile buttons. Naturally, the remote is water-resistant

with an IPX7 design and its one-year battery life of ARX70 makes it so you can install it wherever is most convenient on your boat without having to cut holes or run wires. It's as simple as placing, pairing, and then playing. This device also works well with FUSION's Multi-Zone technology which allows you to create multiple independent audio zones on your vessel. The ARX70 can interface with these compatible FUSION stereos and act as the media controller for a single zone at a time, making it so you can cycle through all independent audio zones for complete control. Heck, you could even install multiple ARX remotes across your boat for each zone, giving you more control over your vessel's entertainment system than you thought possible.

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LED Light Kit

Who doesn't want to turn some heads with their undeniable pontoon style? With Overton's 24 Flex Track LED Light Kit designed specifically for pontoon boats, you'll be the talk of the lake—in a good way. The kit comes with everything you need to customize and light up your boat at night. It's also flexible, so it's great for turning corners and lighting those hard-to-reach areas on your boat. Instead of just one color, the dual color LED light cycles between blue and white lights using a standard on/off toggle switch that's sold separately. The LED Light Kit is energy-efficient and the flex light strip has a 6-inch wire lead that wires directly to your 12-volt source. Additionally, the kit includes six, 4-foot-long pieces of mounting track, two 12-foot-long flex lighting strips, four white end caps, 30 stainless screws and 24 feet of adhesive mounting tape.

\$149.99 | www.overtons.com



Triple Rod Holder

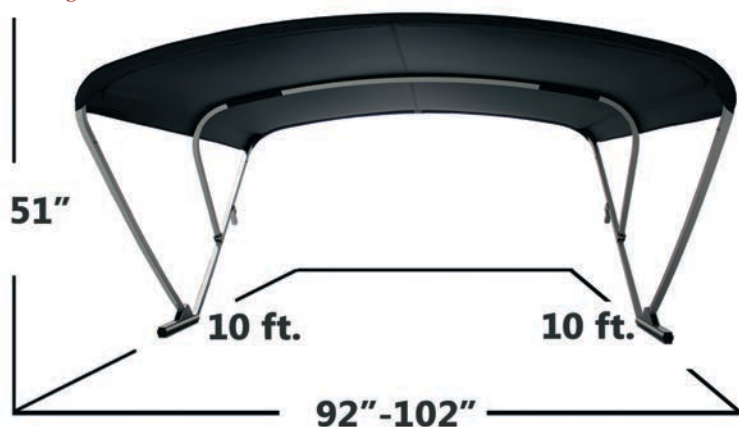
If you're an avid angler, then you know you can never have enough places to put all your fishing equipment. If this is sounding familiar, then you're definitely going to love the Tempres Fish ON! Triple Rod Holder. After all, who doesn't want a more organized way to keep their gear on hand while fishing? This stylish organizer gives you even more places to put your fillet knife, pliers, and baits and there's even a shelf for some extra line or scents. The rod holder can store three upright rods and it's fabricated from polished 204 stainless steel, with injection molded ABS inserts to protect your valuable fishing rods and tools. With the Tempres Triple Rod Holder, you'll be catching fish in no time.

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Bimini top that can be added to virtually any pontoon or deck boat. Whether you're escaping from the blistering heat, going under a bridge or pulling onto your covered lift, you'll never have to leave your seat to take your Bimini top up or down—it's as simple as a push of a button. Plus, the PWR-ARM is super stylish and will only make high-end boats look even more attractive. There's a generous color selection for the fabric top, so you'll get exactly what you're looking for in your chosen color scheme. The PWR-ARM is also durable since it's built with high strength aluminum alloy for strength and stability, and it's made with high-quality canvas that resists fading and includes zipper pickets. Then don't forget the remote control option to make things even easier.

\$1,206.35 and up | www.pwr-arm.com



VANTAGE Pontoon Combo Kit

If you want to keep your pontoons looking shiny and new, check out the VANTAGE Pontoon Combo Kit. This crowd pleaser includes the Pontoon Guard and the Pontoon Wrap. The Pontoon Guard is a heavy-duty Extruded PVC material that gives you long-lasting protection from the inevitable bumper rash, trailer guides and boat lift rails that make your pontoon tubes look older and damaged. It protects your pontoon from scratches and other common damage, and if you already have some existing scratches, it'll cover them up to keep you looking stylish. The Pontoon Wrap also offers unique stylish looks while granting your boat more protection. Made from high quality 3M film, the wraps are more effective than painting or buffing your boat. The Wrap Film and Pontoon Guards are available in different shades of color and you can even mix and match them so that your boat looks as cool as possible.

Average Price with

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LilliPad Diving Board

If you're ready to take fun to the next level, consider investing in the LilliPad Diving Board. You can install it right onto your boat and before you know it, you and your family will be somersaulting off the board into the lake, having the time of your life. The diving boards are built to last with heavy wall aluminum extrusions, stainless steel hardware and urethane spring components, making it so you can keep diving for years and years to come. With a maximum weight of up to 250 pounds, both children and adults can use the Diving Board. You can even adjust a pin to strengthen the spring for heavier or lighter divers. If you're worried it'll get in the way when you're docking your boat, worry no more because this product is designed with a quick release pin so you can drop the diving board down along the side of the boat while you're not using it. In addition, LilliPad Marine recently released a new option for the diving boards, which is a textured foam rather than the standard grip tape. The textured foam is available in a variety of colors and can only be found on their website and a few select dealers around the country.

\$1,295 and up | www.lillipadmarine.com





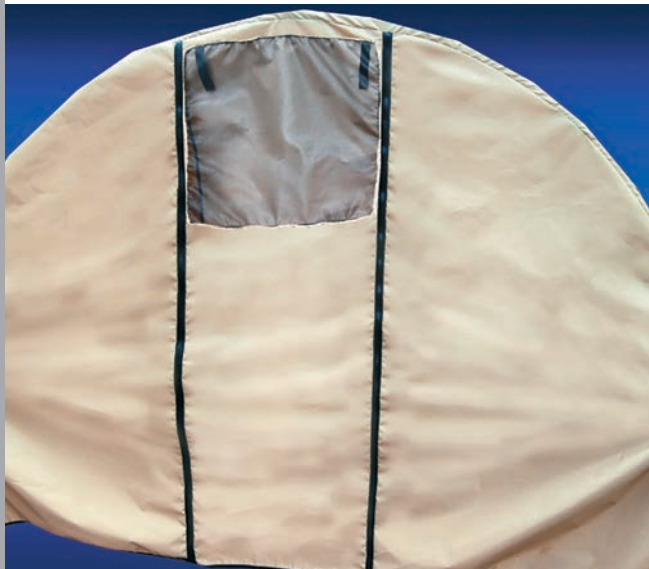
JUMP INTO SUMMER FUN

Whether it's a lady's day out, family water sport fun, or casting a line towards the catch of the day, the Sylvan Mirage Series has the floor plan that's perfect for you. Led by class-leading technology, comfort and styling, we will leave you wondering why you don't hop aboard sooner.
www.SYLVANMARINE.com

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Pontoon Easy-Up Enclosure

Taylor Made Products' Pontoon Enclosure is the perfect fit for boat camping or just getting away from it all on those long days out on the lake. This product grants shade, shelter and privacy, which are always a plus on hot summer days. The spacious enclosure fits easily over the bow area of your pontoon and it's made from durable polyester shell that's also fire retardant. It has a zippered entryway, mesh windows and it's supported by a shock-corded fiberglass pole framework. The enclosure measures about 56 inches deep and 74 inches tall with a large interior radius, which allows you to sit comfortably in your pontoon's bow seating without having to bend or crouch down. This pontoon enclosure is easy to set up and can be taken down in minutes for convenient storage, and it also comes in multiple colors to best match your existing Bimini or canvas.

\$259.99 / www.taylormadeproducts.com



Rear Mount Pontoon Ladder

If you own a pontoon, then you know it can sometimes be a challenge to climb out of the water on a conventional pontoon boat ladder—the struggle is real unless you're an Olympic athlete. That's why AquaStairs developed the rear mount pontoon boat ladders. The design of this stair step ladder makes it much easier to get out of the water. It's even comfortable for dogs to climb back on board since the steps are 16 inches wide and almost 9 inches deep. The rear mount pontoon ladder has a universal design that will fit as a replacement for the existing ladder on the back of most pontoons, and it's simple to install. The ladder folds down for when you're using it and then folds up for when you're not, making it so it doesn't need to be stored on board while you're underway. This ladder can also work on certain deck boats.

\$669.99 / www.aquastairs.com



SOLIX G2 Fish Finder

Get ready to catch some serious fish with Humminbird's new SOLIX G2 Series fish finder. These second generation units come with brand-new technologies such as the MEGA Imaging+ and the Dual Spectrum CHIRP, all of which work to give anglers like you a more complete picture of the water beneath your feet so you can reel in that big one. These fish finders have incredible integration capabilities with Minn Kota trolling motors, and the MEGA Imaging+ which extends imaging capabilities down to 200 feet for MEGA Down Imaging+ and 200 feet to each side with MEGA Side Imaging+. You'll get some of the clearest, sharpest imaging returns with 20 percent more detail than MEGA Imaging. The fish won't stand a chance against such high tech equipment. In addition to clear, sharp imaging returns, the SOLIX G2 units also grant the option for advanced mapping capabilities so you can find fish-holding areas and eliminate non-productive waters.

\$2,999.99 and up / www.humminbird.com



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By Heather Magda Serrano



Making Waves Initiative

Empowering women to rock the boat

At the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), they believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience and enjoy the beloved sports of boating and fishing. For over 20 years they've promoted and encouraged people to climb into the captain's seat, grab a fishing rod, and head off to reel in that big one. For this reason, when they discovered that a lot of women were joining the sport of fishing but dropping out at an alarming rate, they knew they had to do something to keep them active.

Thus, the Making Waves initiative was born—a campaign designed to empower girls and women to shrug off the perceived norms and rock the boat with rods and tackle boxes in hand.

The RBFF launched the campaign in May of last year and they've gained nothing but momentum ever since.

Changing The Image

Stephanie Vatalaro, the vice president of communications at the RBFF, explained that over the past several years they've seen a trend in growing participation of fishing among women that makes up as much as 45 percent of newcomers to the sport. However, women also have one of the highest dropout rates after their first year.

"So clearly it's not sticking," concluded Stephanie. This realization prompted the RBFF to pull in some other data points to find out why this was, and they discovered only 19 percent of

women actually see themselves in the sport.

Rachel Piacenza, the director of marketing for the RBFF, pointed out that women could go to the tackle shop or to their local sporting goods store and feel out of place because angling is typically marketed towards males and avid anglers who already fish.

Debbie Hanson, a contract blogger for the RBFF, agreed and explained that even though women are one of the fastest-growing demographics in terms of fishing and boating, they generally only see men portrayed in traditional fishing roles which can make them feel out of place on the water.

"So we really wanted to try and change the image of what you see when you think of the

MORE INFORMATION

Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation | www.takemefishing.org





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term *angler*,” shared Rachel.

Getting Women Involved

In order to help women feel more welcome in angling, the RBFF started the Making Waves campaign to help empower women to boat and fish right alongside the men. They're doing this by removing perceived barriers in the sport, increasing the representation of women fishing and they're also introducing a series of fishing workshops designed specifically for women and girls.

“We wanted to put something in the market to show women that they do belong,” added Stephanie, “and they can do it just like anyone else can.”

By showcasing more female anglers and holding fishing workshops for women, the RBFF is getting beyond any negative stigmas surrounding women and angling, and they're encouraging women to learn fishing and boating skills for themselves.

“Based on what I've seen, women are absolutely excited about Making Waves,” shared Debbie. “I think there are a lot of women out there who are really receptive and open to learning.”

Within the blogging sphere, Debbie and the rest of the RBFF bloggers have been working to feature more women and their photos on the blog. They've found it to be very powerful for women to see and read about other women like themselves who enjoy the same interests.

“We're definitely using a lot of female voices and influencers to help relay the message that women are out

there fishing too,” attested Debbie, “and it's awesome to see how they're continuing to build their skills and develop their expertise in the sport.”

Debbie, Stephanie and Rachel have all noticed a positive response from women on social media, and the ads they've done for the campaign were some of the most well-received of all the campaigns they've run, which is quite impressive since they run several. With the contagious enthusiasm, the RBFF has seen an increase in their female following on social channels and women's participation was up this past year.

Empowering Women

The Making Waves campaign has already reached so many women and encouraged them to start fishing. Just being out there on the water and learning new skills is empowering in itself, whether it be learning to drive a boat, dock a boat, or being able to tie different boating knots.

All the confidence that comes with seeing themselves portrayed as anglers and learning new skills is why Debbie thinks Making Waves is such a fantastic initiative. “Women are seeing more of themselves out there, hearing of more women who are captains operating boats, and it's really helping to get more women involved,” related Debbie. “They see that it's possible and they see other women just like themselves doing it. It's inspiring to them.”

Doubtlessly the RBFF will continue to see success and make a difference in women's lives as they continue to make waves. •


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By Emily FitzPatrick

#254 BENNINGTON – The Model of Comfort

Everyone has a label. The man wearing all black and eyeliner as he stomps down the street – Goth. The young woman with a soft smile, a braid crown, and a headband resting against her forehead – boho chic. We all are aware of these labels and the impact they have upon how we are perceived. After all, one thing everyone knows about labels is that they are impossible to escape, especially in a society that relies so heavily upon binaries.

However, some labels are worth holding onto as tightly as you can like the word “comfort,” which has become a staple

when describing Bennington pontoons. Everyone who has had some sort of involvement in the boating industry knows Bennington is among the leaders in pontoon comfort when entertaining your family and friends.

Four of Bennington's pontoons that were recently tested proved to be no exception to this general rule, providing everything a boater would need for a good time out on the water, including comfortable seating, roomy amounts of space for storage, and luxurious helms that makes the captain feel like the king of his vessel.

BENNINGTON S20 CRUISE

The S20 Cruise is a value-driven model, but it also provides quality, making it a calming presence that allows you to feel as if you are truly one with the water.

The helm console is extremely attractive, especially for the price point of this boat. It has gauges that are easy to read with rocker switches on each side of the steering wheel. The Kicker stereo system and a USB port are right beside each other for easy access to your tunes, and a Garmin has been positioned on the farthest right-side of the helm.

L-shaped couches in the back of the boat provide comfortable seating and storage for the ten people this vessel is rated for. The storage options at the back of the boat provide a great place to store your tubes, coolers, or anything else you might need to enjoy a relaxing day on the water. Also, a small boarding area provides just enough room for guests to towel off before hopping back on board for a new adventure.

A 70hp Yamaha outboard smoothly powered the S20 Cruise and is sure to provide a relaxing ride for any family or group of friends wanting to escape their troubles for the weekend. ●

Specifications

LOA: 20' 6"
Beam: 8' 6"
Max Capacity: 10 people
Max HP: 90hp
Fuel Capacity: 21.4 gals.
Engine: Yamaha 70hp
0-20 MPH: 7.45 seconds
Price As Tested: \$29,206

RPM vs. SPEED vs. DB-A

900	2.3	65
1000	1.8	70
1500	3.0	77
2000	4.6	81
2500	6.0	83
3000	7.4	85
3500	8.5	85
4000	10.8	90
4500	14.2	95
5000	16.3	95
5500	18.1	97
6000	19.4	97
6100	20.3	101





MORE INFO Bennington | www.benningtonmarine.com



Specifications

LOA: 27' 2"
 Beam: 8' 6"
 Max Capacity: 15 people
 Max HP: 400hp
 Fuel Capacity: 35.2 gals.
 Engine: Mercury 300hp
 0-20 MPH: 4.86 seconds
 Price As Tested: \$148,479

RPM vs. SPEED vs. DB-A

600	1.3	73
1000	3.0	81
1500	5.7	81
2000	7.6	82
2500	11.6	87
3000	14.4	91
3500	18.6	92
4000	23.1	96
4500	26.8	98
5000	31.6	99
5500	37.6	102
6000	43.2	105

BENNINGTON R25 FASTBACK

We don't know about you, but we love a good-looking boat. The R25 Fastback runs fantastically and is aesthetically appealing, even to those without much knowledge of pontoons. On the outside of the boat, metallic silver paired with a storm graphic is sure to catch the eye of your jealous neighbor. However, this boat isn't just eye-catching on the outside. Driftwood upholstery, seagrass slate flooring, and a luxury diamond stitch upgrade on the chairs make a pontooner want to sit up and admire their immediate surroundings and not just the natural setting floating by.

"She really turns effortlessly. It's beautiful how this boat performs," stated the PDB editor during the test. "What makes this boat turn so well is that it's got a great hull and a lot of power. It's clearly a comfortable boat with great performance."

The dual helm stands add a sleek look to the vessel, and a luxurious console with a Mercury gauge provides boaters with all of the information they could possibly need right at their fingertips. Overall, the R25 Fastback proves that it is more than just a pretty face. •



BENNINGTON SXP 23 SWINGBACK

If you're in the market for a fun, sporty family pontoon, the Bennington SXP 23 Swingback could be the perfect fit for you. One of the highlights of this boat is the section in the stern where it has a great L-shaped lounge with very comfortable seating. It's the perfect place to kick back with your family and this section also converts easily into rear lounge complete with a Kicker stereo remote, two cupholders and a USB port.

The SXP 23 has got a spacious swim deck which gives you plenty of room to towel off before you come inside the boat. The boating ladder on the back is comfortable when climbing up and down as well. Another feature worthy of note is how easy it is to access the pop-up changing room.

At the helm you've got easy-to-read gauges and rocker switches on each side. You also have great access to your Kicker stereo and your media ports. Then the colored Garmin GPS on the dash makes it super easy to navigate where you want to go. It's the added touches that really make the Benningtons stand out. For example, we loved the fabric inlays and contours of the seating which really made the vessel more luxurious. Rated for 12 passengers, this boat includes comfortable seating for everyone in the family. ●

Specifications

LOA: 23' 11.5"
 Beam: 8' 6"
 Max Capacity: 12 people
 Max HP: 150hp
 Fuel Capacity: 21.4 gals.
 Engine: Yamaha 150hp
 0-20 MPH: 5.05 seconds
 Price As Tested: \$71,444

RPM vs. SPEED vs. DB-A

900	2.5	64
1000	3.1	68
1500	4.9	78
2000	6.9	79
2500	9.2	82
3000	12.1	84
3500	17.1	89
4000	21.0	95
4500	26.2	96
5000	30.4	100
5500	34.2	105
6000	36.4	106
6100	37.0	110



Specifications

LOA: 31' 3"
Beam: 10' 0"
Max Capacity: 23/21 people
Max HP: 800hp
Fuel Capacity: 83 gals.
Engine: Twin Yamaha
300hp Outboards
0-20 MPH: 3.82 seconds
Price As Tested: \$255,321

RPM vs. SPEED vs. DB-A

600	1.6	74
1000	6.0	83
1500	8.0	85
2000	10.8	87
2500	16.6	94
3000	21.3	89
3500	26.6	91
4000	31.8	95
4500	35.6	96
5000	39.9	100
5500	44.6	101
6000	47.9	103

BENNINGTON Q30 WIDE-BEAM FASTBACK

The Q30 Wide-Beam Fastback draws pontooners in with its new metallic silver coating on the outside that was introduced by Bennington this year, and pontooners are sure to find some of their favorite standard features once they step on board this vessel. Storage doors on the bow, a beautiful console at the helm, and plenty of place for storage are just a few features that Bennington consistently delivers on.

"If this boat looks a little wider than normal it's because it is!" shared Brady L. Kay, editor of *Pontoon and Deck Boat* magazine. "It's part of that wide beam Bennington offers and they really use the space. This boat is rated for up to 23 passengers and that's a lot of family and friends."

At the helm of the Q30 Wide-Beam Fastback a gorgeous console is centered on a Yamaha digital gauge, with a Simrad touchscreen and a row of rocker switches below. This vessel also has joystick steering, which makes docking quick and easy business. And across from the helm is an identical seat to the captain's, so someone can help keep your responsible driver company. •



BUTTON LAMP

Adhesive LEDs

Product Score: 92

Portability 20/20

Function 47/50

Durability 8/10

Design 8/10

Price 9/10

847-783-5900

www.panthervision.com

By Nicole Richens

While on a recent test we were attempting to inspect a dark in-floor ski locker on a pontoon boat when I had to reach for my smartphone to activate the built-in flashlight. Minutes later I had the same issue while checking out the wiring under the helm. My cell phone worked, but I was curious if someone made a small light that didn't require running wires to so it could be placed anywhere. I thought I might have stumbled upon an innovative idea, but turns out Panther Vision and its BUTTON LAMP is already offering the ideal go-anywhere light.

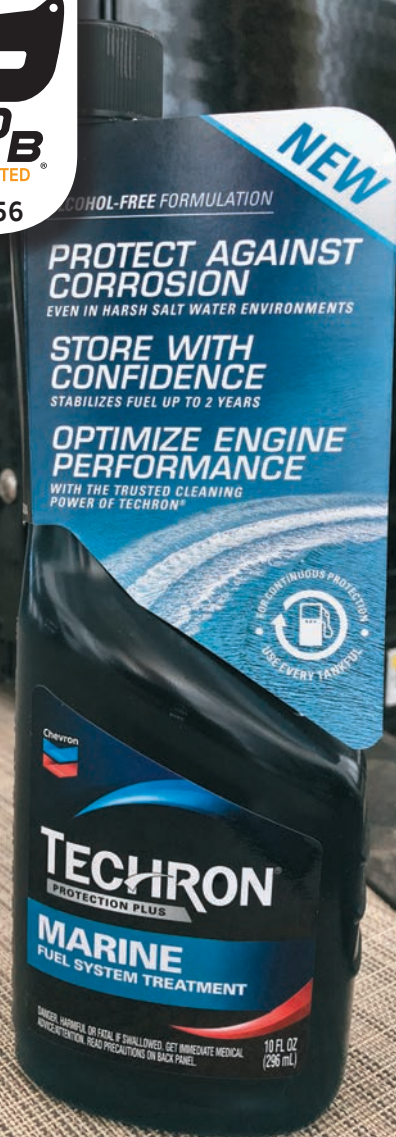
At just \$9.99 for a set of six adhesive LED lights, it's hard to

beat. The possibilities to brighten up those areas without any hassle are truly endless and because they're waterproof they'll work great for boaters. With a strong adhesive backing, you can place the lamps anywhere you need with one quick thumb press. Woods, metals, plastics and other common surfaces are all easy to work with. I was most impressed by the amount of light it offers considering it's no larger than a quarter so you hardly notice it until you activate it. To turn it on you just flip a toggle switch to one side and you get an estimated 17 hours of use, but once it's done the battery can't be replaced. ●

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TECHRON MARINE FUEL SYSTEM TREATMENT

Chevron

By Roy Sparks

Product Score: 94

Portability 20/20
Function 47/50
Durability 9/10
Design 9/10
Price 9/10

www.techronclean.com

Since being released last year, the biggest misconception of the new Techron Marine Fuel System Treatment is that it's just a great storage product. Don't get me wrong: it will stabilize the fuel in your boat for up to 24 months, but this new formula is so much more that just a winterizing tool. It provides worry-free boating all season long as well as during those extended periods of non-use.

In our area we had a beautiful fall, which allowed us extra time on the water after we began testing the Techron Marine formula that is specifically for gasoline-powered boats and the harsh marine environment. Its proprietary alcohol and emulsifier-free formula does not contribute to water uptake and provides boaters with superior protection and performance, along with enhanced fuel stabilization and the proven cleaning power of the Techron brand.

We're using Techron Marine in our Avalon pontoon with a Mercury 150hp four-stroke, but it can be used in boats powered by all inboard, outboard and sterndrive gasoline engines, including two-stroke, four-stroke, carbureted, port or electronic fuel injected and direct-injected engines. It is ideal for use with ethanol-free gasoline or a wide range of ethanol-blended fuels from E10 to E85.

This breakthrough additive formulation delivers performance benefits with every use, providing complete fuel system protection — plus it won't contribute to phase separation. We're primarily freshwater boaters so we relied on test data from Chevron that showed Techron Marine provides corrosion protection in both fresh and saltwater environments. Simply put, it works well for all boaters.

For our tow vehicles we already recognize the cleaning power of the Techron brand so it's nice to see it further benefiting boaters by restoring power and performance and optimizing fuel efficiency by cleaning fuel injectors, throttle bodies, carburetors and combustion chambers. It cleans intake valve deposits in port fuel injected engines, for smoother idling and enhanced throttle response. This exclusive cleaning power also helps minimize cold start problems, while preventing and removing gum and varnish in the fuel system.

As an added benefit on our pontoon, the proprietary Techron formula began to clean up the fuel system and engine with our first application, and then it will keep it clean as the boat is fueled up, re-treated and operated throughout our boating season.

"Our industry research identified gaps in the performance of marine fuel additives currently on the market and indicated a strong need for a new solution," said Joe DeFina, Chevron's North America fuel additives business manager. "We formulated a more comprehensive, high-performance fuel additive, combining best-in-class protection with the cleaning power of the Techron brand. Techron Marine Fuel System Treatment was specifically engineered and tested to deliver maximum protection for the harsh environment that boats operate in, the demanding engine cycles common in recreational boating, and the way boats are stored for extended periods of time."

Only 1 ounce of this formula is required to treat 10 gallons of fuel and Techron Marine is offered in three package sizes to accommodate the needs of different types of boaters. Easily stored 4-ounce bottles (\$5.99) are a convenient way for pontoons to treat up to 40 gallons of fuel. Owners of larger boats and/or higher horsepower engines can treat up to 100 gallons of fuel with the 10 ounce bottle (\$13.99). And for the most active boating enthusiasts, Techron Marine is also offered in a value size 128 ounce bottle (\$94.99) that treats 1,280 gallons of fuel. This new fuel additive will be offered to boaters through West Marine and other boating products retailers nationwide. ●





NIGHT VISION CAMERA Experiencing the SiOnyx Aurora



As we get older I would speculate we daydream less about having a super power, not like when we were eight and it was all we ever thought about. On a recent trip to Florida, the PDB staff and other members of the media were given the opportunity to test and review the new SiOnyx Aurora night vision camera in a true boating environment. Or in other words, on this evening we were all given the super power of being able to see in the dark. The testing coincided with the sunset as we boarded the *Musette II* and explored the Fort Lauderdale inland waterway.

The Aurora is the world's first waterproof day/night camera, tailored to enhance the nighttime boating experience. It's the only hi-definition, color action-camera with true day and night imaging. It can sync with a smartphone app to seamlessly share your experiences with friends, as well as take compass bearings, navigate waypoints, and more.

As stated by one media member on board the cruise that evening, "Half action-cam, half super-sensitive low-light color monocular, the Aurora is a curious result of an overactive wish list."

We were lured on this cruise by the

promise that the Aurora would let us see in the dark, take pictures in the dark, and video in the dark, which was enough to pique my curiosity. While you could argue there are other devices that let you do this, this one does it in color and after our own experience, its greatest feature might just be its user-friendly design. If you're not a fan of having to dive through menus to make changes to your devices, you're going to love this camera.

Stephen Saylor, president and CEO of SiOnyx, gave a little background on the company then turned it over to Dan Cui who passed out the handheld cameras and gave us all a very brief demo. The lights on the top deck of the boat were then turned off and without ever reading a menu or getting any detailed instructions, we were all able to easily maneuver the controls in the dark as we explored the different features.

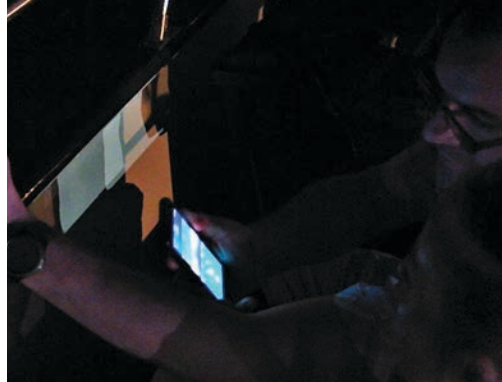
Its controls are more camera-like than other night vision products. If you want to go from taking still images to video, just rotate the dial one click. There is no entering the menu system. Want to play back your footage? Just two more clicks. It's really that simple. There is even a big record button on top to get you started.

Product Score: 90

Portability 20/20
Function 47/50
Durability 8/10
Design 8/10
Price 7/10

978-922-0684
www.sionyx.com

By Brady L. Kay



As the cruise went on, we all became more and more comfortable using the Aurora as we dialed in the functions including the ability to zoom and adjust for the perfect exposure. Worth noting, the lens focus is manual only, but it is surprisingly easy to focus in the dark, thanks to the bright OLED EVF.

Smaller boats would pass by, completely unaware that we were all able to view them perfectly as they cruised by in darkness. The Aurora uses infrared technology and a specially developed sensor with large pixels to shoot in conditions as dim as 0.001lux and has three shooting modes: Night (F1.4), Twilight (F2.0), and Day (F5.6).

SiOnyx says the camera's performance compares to night vision optics that cost 'tens of thousands of dollars' and that this is the first time such night-vision capabilities have been available to the

consumer.

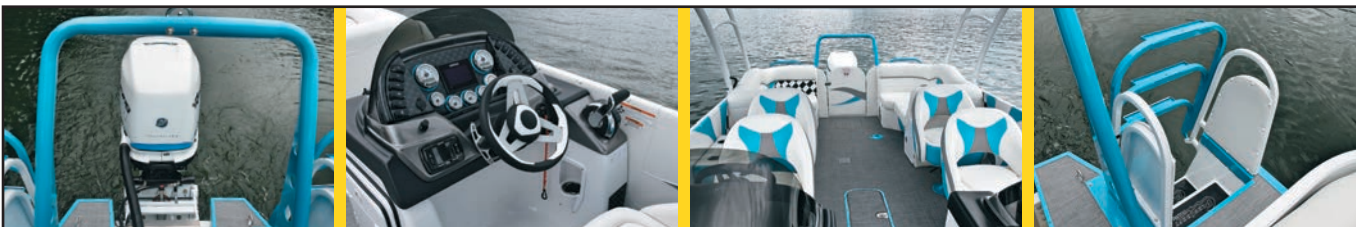
The Aurora uses a 1-inch sensor with 0.9 million large pixels that are created using what the company describes as a proprietary laser process. The process creates 'the ultimate light-trapping pixels' that have increased quantum efficiency and so avoid excessive noise and restricted dynamic range while producing images 10x brighter than a standard CMOS sensor. The sensor design is based on military-grade IR sensors that the company usually makes only for the defense market.

The pixels have extended sensitivity to light between 850 and 940nm in the near-infrared area of the spectrum, and a maximum ANSI of 820,000 - and so can produce viewable images even in what would appear to the human eye to be darkness. The camera can also shoot still images (albeit obviously at a very low

resolution), as well as time-lapse sequences and 720p video.

The camera is also fitted with GPS, an accelerometer and a compass for adventurers, and can be used underwater for 30 minutes to a depth of 3 feet.

The Aurora retails for \$799 and for all that it's capable of I would recommend it to those who do a lot of boating at night. I do however want to stress what the camera is not for. It's neither designed for capturing high-resolution images for prints or HD monitors nor for shooting video for professional productions. Hence, it is not in the same category as low-light mirror less cameras or DSLRs. The camera is very useful as a device to do tasks in the dark—especially when safety might be an issue—and to capture outdoor activities and the natural world at night in a fun and easy way. The uses are truly endless. ●



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A MUCH-NEEDED PERFORMANCE LIFT

Testing the next generation of T.A.P. FINS

By Brady L. Kay

When you're about to put pen to paper and finalize the purchase of your new pontoon, the list of options available for those custom ordering can feel a little intimidating. Often buyers prefer to stick to their pre-determined budget or take more amenities above deck rather than opt for performance upgrades such as an aluminum underskin and lifting strakes. For some, the decision not to give performance more of a thought can come back to haunt you but before you rush back to the dealer to talk trade-in value, Conrad Marine has an alternative solution that involves keeping your boat.

Last fall the PDB staff stopped into Long Island Marina on Lake Norman in North Carolina to talk with the owner who has found this aftermarket solution to be a good fit for his customers and has been having success with the T.A.P. FIN product from Conrad Marine for over 17 years.

"We sell a lot of the Bentley 220 Navigators because it's a mid-line boat that is a good fit for those looking for an all-around family pontoon," says marina owner Eb Pyle. "From the manufacturer you can add hydraulic steering, an aluminum belly skin and lifting strakes, but here at Long Island Marina we use a lot of the T.A.P. FIN systems and the reason is you don't have to do the aluminum underbellies and the lifting strakes and you

get more performance for your dollar. The FINS handle better, in your turns it doesn't lean out, it runs flat and again you just get more performance out of your boat for the dollar."

TRIPLE THREAT

Years of on-water product testing went into the development of the T.A.P. FINS system from Conrad Marine and the latest design of the popular aftermarket accessory is focused on doing more than just improving your pontoon's performance. With less spray and reduced drag you can take your enjoyment to a whole new level.

Improvements to the latest version were developed specifically to benefit triple pontoon hulls – referred to as the SSG Edition – and are geared towards larger outboard engines on models that typically include bigger fuel tanks and more overall weight compared to pontoons that were built 10 or so years ago.

"A strake can only do so much," says T.A.P. FIN inventor Malcolm Sohm. "This new design improves the turning for a smoother ride, which is what you'd expect in a high-end pontoon. Plus you get a drier back deck with an increase in speed and handling."

VERSATILITY

We first stopped in the Long Island Marina Showroom in Terrell, N.C., to take a look at

MORE INFO

Bentley Pontoons
803-520-5280
www.bentleypontoons.com

Conrad Marine
828-478-9585
www.conradmarine.com

Evinrude
844-345-4277
www.evinrude.com

Long Island Marina
828-241-4877
www.longislandmarina.com

Long Island
Marina Showroom
828-478-4877

Aftermarket 89

Installation 16/20
Function 47/50
Durability 9/10
Design 9/10
Price 8/10

828-478-9585
www.conradmarine.com



At Rest



Underway



a full display of boats this dealer offers before heading to the nearby marina in Catawba to get behind the wheel of a couple of Bentley pontoons.

During our test we reached a top speed of 43 mph on the Bentley Elite 223 Admiral SE powered with an Evinrude 200hp G2 E-TEC and it included a 15-foot center pony tube with 2-inch FINS on both sides of each log as well as on the center tube. On the Bentley 220 Navigator SE with only two pontoons and equipped with FINS, we were still able to reach a top speed of 38 mph with a 150hp Evinrude 150 G2 E-TEC on the back. As far as handling, on both Bentleys we popped up on plane quickly and felt completely in control during our turns.

SAVINGS COMPARISON

According to Pyle, at his marina a set of T.A.P. FINS will cost between \$1,500 to \$1,800, while adding hydraulic steering and an aluminum skin as a manufacturer option will run his customers anywhere between \$3,500 and \$5,000 depending on the boat.

"We've had a lot of success with customers who wanted better performance out of their pontoon after buying it and ended up loving the T.A.P. FINS," says the marina owner. "So that's a direction we like to steer people when they buy a boat from us to help them not only save money, but get more out of their pontoon." ●

Sun-Powered Deep-Cycle

Aftermarket solar charger accessory

By Dan Armitage

Since rigging the family pontoon for spider-rigging for crappies, which has improved my catch rate, and experiencing surprising success while silent-trolling crankbaits for saugeye and walleye, I've been using my bow-mounted electric motor more than ever. I rigged the Harris FloteBote with a Minn Kota Terrova a couple seasons back and installed a model powered by a single 12-volt, deep-cycle battery. I chose that model because it cost less than 24- or 36-volt models and I only had room for one deep-cycle battery in addition to the starting cell in the under-seat locker designated and wired for batteries.

The combo worked fine for part-time use of the bow power, but once I started using the electric motor as primary fishing propulsion I often depleted the deep-cycle battery of 'juice' over the course of a weekend or a long day of fishing. The boat slip where we keep our pontoon docked does not offer electric power for connecting to an on board battery charger, so I'd have to lug the heavy deep-cycle cell home and back between weekends to charge it back to full strength.

Several of the boats in my local pontoon owner's boat club have sprouted solar panels of various sizes in recent seasons, most of which are used to maintain starting batteries between uses. Our lake is limited to 9.9hp outboards, which often doesn't generate enough electricity to fully recharge a battery. After talking to a few peers and doing some research on companies that offer solar systems for marine use, I got in touch with the folks at PulseTech Products Corporation. We discussed a solar charging system that might work to top off my deep-cycle battery during the week between weekend warrior fishing outings, and they recommended a SolarPulse model SP-10. The unit offers up to 10 watts of power and removes the buildup of lead sulfate deposits on the battery plates, a common cause of failure.

MORE INFO

PulseTech
www.pulsetech.net

Optima Batteries
www.optimabatteries.com

I ordered that model and mounted it using a pair of 18-inch bendable aluminum straps from ACE Hardware on the aft end of the boat's playpen fence, a process that took about an hour. We placed it there because the transom of the boat faces south at our slip, for it's important to position the panel so that it faces the direction from which it will receive the most sunlight. I also ordered a 34M size Optima Blue Top deep-cycle AGM battery which, unlike larger Optima models, has a built-in carrying handle and fits in the locker beside the starting battery.

That said, after a full season of use, not once did I have to pull that 38-pound cell out of the locker, carry it down the dock and up the ramps to the car – and back – for recharging. The sun did it all in a state that logged 128 days out of 365 with rain over the past 12 months. And if I needed it, I could use the system to re-charge my starting battery instead of the deep-cycle between uses.

See the next page for some of the major steps in the surprisingly simple rigging-for-solar process:



DAN'S PICK | Harris Cruiser 210 FS

The fishing floor plan of this entry-level Harris model accommodates anglers yet keeps non-fishing passengers comfortable while aboard this affordable 21-footer. But of interest to those of us who like to wet a line are the fishing options, which include two fishing seats, fish finder and GPS, in-floor rod storage, rod holders on the rails and an aft fishing station featuring a livewell, rod holders and vertical rod storage. At the bow is a half gate and receptacle to accommodate a bow-mounted electric trolling motor. I've owned a Cruiser sister-model Sunliner 200 for a decade and find Harris boats well-made and priced fairly and the sky is the limit in terms of models and options – fishing and otherwise – offered across their extensive line of pontoons. I would not hesitate to own another – but am enjoying the wait for our 1987 Sunliner model to wear out. •

Specifications

LOA: 22' 1"

Max Capacity: 12

Beam: 8' 6"

Max HP: 150hp

Weight: 2,293 lbs.

Fuel Capacity: 28 gals.

www.harrisboats.com



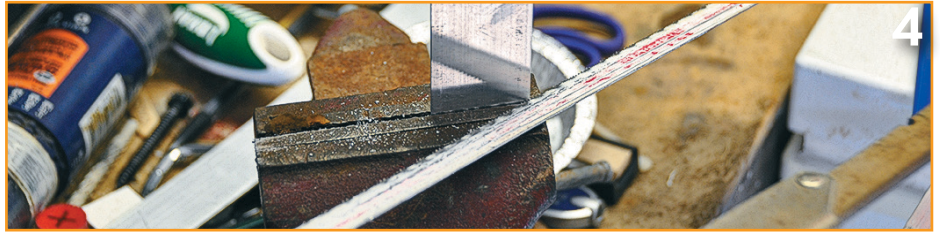
The tools and hardware required to mount a PulseTech SP-10 unit are minimal and the job took less than an hour to complete. An aluminum strap measuring 36 inches long, an inch wide and 1/8-inch thick; stainless steel self-tapping screws; nuts; and bolts rounds out the hardware needed. A hacksaw, power drill, screwdriver and wrench are the tools required.



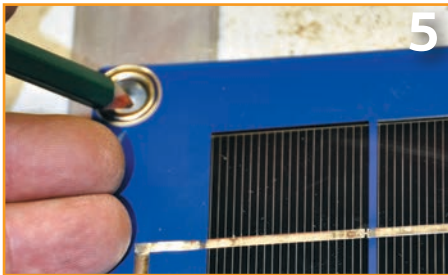
The first step is finding a position on the playpen rail to mount the collection panel, where it will attract the maximum amount of the sun's rays based on where the boat is positioned, at a dock, secured to a stake, or on a trailer between uses.



Measure the distance between the mounting rails to which the aluminum straps will be secured and mark locations for drilling the eight mounting holes for the self-tapping screws and the bolts that will secure the panel to the straps.



Cut the 36-inch strap into two 18-inch-long sections.



Using the solar collection panel as a guide, mark the locations of the holes for securing the panel to the straps and drill those holes.



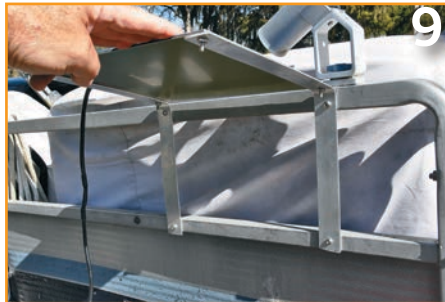
Drill the holes in the straps for mounting to the playpen rails.



Attach the straps to the panel using stainless steel bolts and nuts.



Using the holes in the straps as pilots, drill the mounting holes in the railing for the self-tapping screws. Secure the straps to the rail with the screws.



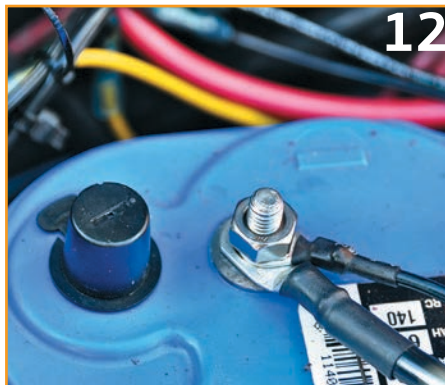
The aluminum straps are thin enough to be bent down to hold the panel at any angle suitable for collecting the most sunlight.



Once that angle is determined, route the lead cable attached to the panel to the battery locker. At 17 feet the cable is plenty long for most pontoon boat applications and has a handy quick-disconnect feature that makes it easy to route through small openings.



Once that angle is determined, route the lead cable attached to the panel to the battery locker. At 17 feet the cable is plenty long for most pontoon boat applications and has a handy quick-disconnect feature that makes it easy to route through small openings.



Connect the lead's ring connectors to the battery posts.



A red LED indicator light atop the circuit box tells you when the PulseTech unit is using sunlight to re-charge the battery. A blinking light notes partial power and a steady red signals a full power flow to the deep-cycle battery, assuring us that a work week with a reasonable amount of sunlight would top-off the trolling battery in time for the next fishing foray. ●

Today's Outboards

State of the Market 2019



By John Tiger

This month in Power Profile, we'll discuss the state of the outboard market, and the outlook for 2019 and beyond. If you haven't tuned in to the marine propulsion market lately, and you're an outboard fan, you'll be delighted to know that outboards are the darlings of the marine industry. Why? Digital control and advanced engineering coupled with precision manufacturing, plus a boost from ever-encroaching EPA regulations, have teamed up to make outboards the powerplants of choice, whether the craft is a pontoon, center console, family runabout or back-bay bass chaser.

THE NEW DARLINGS

But how is that possible? Just a short decade ago, stern drives were the market leaders, for any number of reasons—they hid sveltely below decks, with only the outdrive protruding. They were quieter, used less fuel, were based on proven automotive powerplants, and perhaps most significant—were cheaper.

Not anymore. The market has

seemingly overcome the old, "tall and handsome but ugly on the transom" stigma of outboards, and embraced the modern wonder of today's clamp-on (er... bolt-on). Why?

To start, outboards are now more fuel efficient, and on par or better than stern drives in meeting EPA emissions standards. They've always been lighter, which makes for a better and more reactive hull package. With the recent advent of GPS and digital computer controlled docking, trim and idling functions, outboards have become easier to start, run and handle better than stern drives. To illustrate the market's love for outboards, consider that offshore center consoles and cruisers up to 65 feet are now using multiple outboards as the power of choice.

BENEFITS FOR PONTOONS

What does all this mean? First and foremost, as most pontoons and deck boats are designed around outboard power, it means huge strides and more

choices for our craft. A quick look at each outboard manufacturer's website confirms this. Second, it means that as the trend toward larger outboards continues, in turn larger pontoons will benefit—we'll go faster, in more comfort, with less noise and burning less fuel. Third, for sure consumers will benefit from the improved fuel economy, quieter powerplants and higher levels of convenience. Of course the entire planet will benefit from the lower emissions levels as outboards get cleaner.

FOCUSING IN

With boat shows upon us and consumers eyeing new rigs, it pays to have a quick look at what's available in outboard power for 2019, and what pontoon-specific engines deserve scrutiny. "Pontoon" engines may be rated at the same horsepower as their brand brothers, but may have special features to enhance performance on pontoon hulls. Like what, you say? Well, let's drill down:



HONDA

Honda's midrange BF Series is available in three versions: 75, 90 and 100hp models, each based on the same 1496cc (91 cubic inch) four-stroke four-cylinder inline design. Don't let their midrange size fool you; these are sophisticated, fuel-efficient electronically

fuel-injected engines with single overhead cams and 16 valves. The higher horsepower of the 90 and 100 models is achieved with better breathing, different ECM programming, and a higher rpm range at the top end (5500 for the 75, 5800 for the 90, and 5,900 for the 100). The 75 and 90 operate on 87

octane fuel, while the 100 needs 93 octane premium. All three employ a 2.33:1 gear ratio for strong low-end pulling power and use the same 44-amp alternator. At 359 pounds, each Honda is available in 20- and 25-inch shaft lengths.

www.marine.honda.com



YAMAHA

Yamaha offers a brand-new pontoon-aimed midrange F90 four-stroke weighing in at 353 pounds. It's based on a 1.8-liter inline four cylinder block and features electronic fuel injection. Available in 20- and 25-inch shafts, the F90 has been tested to be a mile and half faster than competing engines. Though it's "just a midrange engine," the light weight, quick acceleration curve and stout power is a real breakthrough for four-stroke engines; like Merc's new big boys, this midsize Yam shows that four strokes can be light and torquey at the same time.

At the high end of the power scale, the VMAX SHO high performance 250 is available in 20- and 25-inch shaft versions, making it a versatile offering for new, larger pontoons and repowered older hulls as well. At 505 pounds for the 20-inch and 555 pounds for the 25-inch version, it's right in the sweet spot to compete with current 250 horse offerings from competitors.

www.yamahaaoutboards.com



MERCURY

Mercury's brand-new FourStroke series of outboards is available in a wide range. The 175, 200 and 225 are all based on clean-sheet V6 four-stroke powerplants. The larger 250 and 300 are V8 four-strokes, able to power the largest pontoons with authority, torque and speed. The FourStroke line touts lighter weight (only 475 pounds for the V6s, 527 for the V8s) and easy maintenance features, such as a built-in access door for checking oil level and a handy center lifting handle for removing the cowl. While these new engines are still fresh off their spring 2018 introduction, testing them on the water has revealed that they're everything Merc touts them to be—quiet, powerful, agile and so far, trouble-free.

www.mercurymarine.com



SUZUKI

Suzuki's DF150SS is a mid-range V6 powerhouse; with its 2.5:1 gear ratio, light 474 pounds and high performance appearance, it's a great complement to today's midsized performance pontoons. The racy matte black finish with red cowl accents command attention. We've run this engine on several different hulls, and it's shown us backbone and speed no matter what transom it's bolted to.

www.suzukimarine.com



EVINRUDE

Evinrude has a great lineup of direct-injected two-strokes; while the latest and greatest are the G2 engines (150 to 300hp), Evinrude targets the midrange pontoon market with its Pontoon Series 90 and 115hp E-TEC direct-injected two-strokes. These engines use a high-torque gear ratio (2.36:1 for the 90, 2.25:1 for the 115) for more low-end power and higher thrust. Evinrude is due for some new power introductions, and while the 2019 brochures are already available, insiders say mid-year is the time 'Rude will show us its hand for 2020's offering. Stay tuned.

www.evinrude.com



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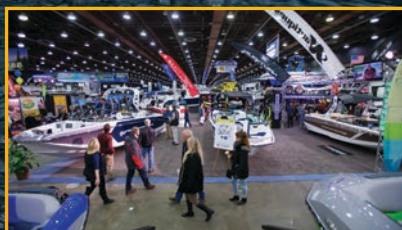
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STAYING IN 'TOON

BOATING TIPS AND OBSERVATIONS WITH SKY SMITH



A My Personal Canvas

Anyone reading my columns will probably realize that my purchase methods might be a bit different than the average pontoon buyer. Actually, I might be different than the average “anything” buyer.

For as long as I can remember I have made a purchase based on not just what I wanted, but also what I can do with it down the road. I go into the purchase with the idea that it's not going to be the same as when I bought it. New, used, doesn't matter. Change is in the wind...or is that on the water? Some think it's a “bad” habit, but not me; I just cannot leave things stock.

When I go to a car dealer to buy a vehicle, I give the salesman my basic needs. Usually it's something like typical extras such as air, cruise, power windows, remote start, satellite radio and a towing package. They always ask what color. I respond with red, white, silver, or whatever is the cheapest. In the past I have asked for rubber floor mats, so I can power wash the inside after the kids, dogs and friends with muddy shoes get out. Did you realize rubber floor mats are special order? Crazy. Anyway, my basics are just that, basics. No heated seats or fancy navigation is necessary. I just want a functional regular vehicle.

But here's where things take a turn. I have a pretty good ego and I like to have things that are

different than other people, so it doesn't stay regular. Once its home the modifications start. Tires, wheels, lights, suspension, anything is possible. This is my way of making it mine.

Same happens with my boats. When I bought a pontoon, I looked for something that would make a good platform to build from. I wanted a boat the two of us could handle easily on and off the trailer. It also needed to be big enough for friends and our standard poodle Buck. I also looked at towing weights because of the vehicle I owned at the time, not knowing it would go through a couple of major issues that prompted me to trade it in.

And even my current Jeep, I said I wanted “typical extras” then walked the line of vehicles looking for a factory installed hitch, the extras and the cheapest price. Happened to be black. I did say I wouldn't own a black vehicle again, but hey, the “law of attraction” put this Jeep in the right place at the right time. (Black Jeep instead of Range Rover, saving money. Okay that's a whole other story).

Back to the pontoon. I could not find a used one that I liked. So, I shopped the new markets in my area. I narrowed it down to three different brands and the Bentley Encore 200 Cruise SE went home with us. Simple basic boat, nothing fancy, but ripe for modifications.

Now after a couple years, I do

have to say, it is my boat. It has a Pontoon Wholesalers Third Pontoon Kit, VANTAGE bumper strip, carbon fiber pontoon wrap, a SeaStar Solutions Baystar hydraulic steering kit and more. And I am still thinking of new things to add to it.

It's important to realize that modifying a pontoon with “do it yourself” projects is not for everyone and that's okay. It doesn't mean your boat is any less yours than mine is mine. It just means your interests lie elsewhere. And that's all good.

If you are wondering, yes, I could have bought a boat that has all the “mods” on it originally. But what fun would that be? That's the key, I like the projects. I like the hands-on modifications. That what I feel makes it more of my boat than just any boat off the lot.

I like to think my “sweat equity” saved me money, but in reality, I am not sure if it really does. For me it is a bigger issue than just the money. Adding aftermarket items to my boat is a fun and satisfying way to get what I want and to make it my creation. Kind of like an artist, but my canvas was a pontoon. ●

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